

Shelley Vana Bills Filed in 2008 Session

House Bill 305
Equine Activities
Also to be known as the Nicole Hornstein Act is to promote the safety and welfare of minors engaging in equestrian activities. Any rider under the age 16 will be required to wear a helmet to decrease the number of serious or fatal head injuries.
I was pleased that this bill passed the House with a unanimous vote. However, it was not able to make it out of the Senate.

House Bill 561
Affordable Senior Housing
Authorizes local governments to include an affordable senior housing element in their comprehensive plan and to specify element requirements.
The language of my bill was incorporated into House Bill 7129. House Bill 7129 died in third reading on the last day of session.

House Bill 749 - Civil Causes of Action under Criminal Street Gang Prevention Act of 1996
Will provide for recovery of costs of investigation and litigation. Authorizes

municipalities and state or its agencies or subdivisions to bring civil action violation. Provides that prevailing plaintiff has claim to property or proceeds superior to that of state or its agencies or subdivisions.
The language of my bill was incorporated into House Bill 43, passed both House and Senate and now awaits the Governor's signature.

House Bill 891
Discretionary Sales Tax
Authorizes specified counties to levy by ordinance surtax for emergency fire rescue services and facilities. It requires a referendum. Provides requirements for the distribution of surtax proceeds, inter-local agreements and for reducing ad valorem tax levies for fire rescue services.
Passed favorably in the Government Efficiency & Accountability Council.

House Bill 1221
Assault/Battery of a Law Enforcement Officer or Other Specified Persons

Expands the definition of terms "prison release reoffender," "habitual violent felony offender" and "three-time violent felony offender" to include; defendant who commits any felony violation relating to an assault or battery of law enforcement officer or other specified person for purpose of sentencing such offenders.
Unable to make it out of committee.

House Bill 1493
Motor Vehicle & Casualty Insurance Contracts
Prohibits insurers from conditioning renewal of policy upon change of limits, elimination of any coverage's or increase in premiums unless insurer provides written notice in advance to insured or insured's insurance agent. Requires that specific reason or reasons for any conditioned renewal or increase in premium be included in or with such notice, provides exceptions.
Passed favorably in Committee on Insurance on March 20. Unable to make it out of the Jobs & Entrepreneurship Council.



Summer, 2008

Legislative Update

From Representative Shelley Vana, House District 85



Budget Looms Large Over Legislature

After spending nine weeks in Tallahassee for this year's legislative session, leaders in the House and Senate put together the spending plan for 2008-09. Florida's budget crisis dominated the 60 day session as we tried to navigate what to do with a nearly \$6 billion cut from last year. Unfortunately, the news is not good as healthcare, education and public safety will see their budgets reduced significantly.

It is because of the spending priorities laid out in the budget and the major reductions made in healthcare, education and criminal justice that I voted against the budget this year. As a result of the budget that passed this year, our children in public school could see critical programs eliminated, it may be harder for high school students

to be admitted in colleges and universities as enrollment is cut and our seniors could have less than adequate healthcare.


In practical terms, this means seniors will have to wait longer to get the care they need or to be turned in their beds. The developmentally disabled will lose critical services.

The week after session adjourned, the University of Florida announced that it planned to reduce student enrollment by 4,000 over the next four years and cut roughly 400 jobs. Other state universities will be making similar decisions as they address the revenue shortfalls and the reduced budgets. Unfortunately, our students will have less, but pay more. Universities and community colleges have no choice but to

resort to tuition increases to offer status quo education to our college students. This will impede our state's ability to attract and retain a knowledge based economy as our best and brightest leave the state.

Public safety agencies will see their budgets reduced as well. Public defenders will lose 129 positions, state attorneys will lose 167 positions and the courts will lose 67. These reductions will make it harder for our criminal justice system to address the rise in crime rates.


These budget cuts were difficult to make and it is unfortunate that our education, health care and public safety systems had to be faced with these devastating cuts. •



Summer, 2008

Legislative Update

From Representative Shelley Vana, House District 85



shelley.vana@myfloridahouse.gov
kathy.peck@myfloridahouse.gov (District Aide)
quianna.gray@myfloridahouse.gov (District Secretary)

Committees and Appointments
Committee on K-12,
Democratic Ranking Member

Policy & Budget Council
Schools & Learning Council
Committee on Energy

District Office 561-640-6120 | 561-640-6123 fax

1280 N. Congress Avenue, Suite 100
West Palm Beach, FL 33409-6377

Pre-Srt Std
US POSTAGE
PAID
Eagle Data, Inc.

Dear Neighbors,

Session has ended, and it's great to be home in our community. This year's legislative session was one of the toughest ever.

We began the session with a \$1 billion revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year so the legislature was forced to reduce programs and services in education and healthcare. Unfortunately, the bad news from our state economists did not stop there. In March we got the devastating news that the budget would have to be cut further. What was once a \$71.9 billion budget at the start of this fiscal year was reduced to

\$66.5 billion. Assembling the annual budget consumed our time in Tallahassee and became the focus of this legislative session.

However, some good initiatives did pass both chambers and are before Gov. Crist for his consideration. Sensible and bipartisan public school reforms were passed that will minimize the reliance on the FCAT as the sole factor in grading schools. We also took initial steps to provide health insurance to the 3.8 million Floridians who are uninsured today. Finally, more smart energy and climate change programs made it out of this legislative session so we can focus our attention on renewable

energy sources rather than depending on oil and other nonrenewable energy.

I will continue to keep you updated throughout the summer and fall regarding legislation that passed this year. It is a pleasure to serve you in the Florida House of Representatives. I urge you to contact my office if there is anything I can assist you with. I am honored to represent our community in the Legislature.

Sincerely,

Shelley Vana
State Representative, District 85

Positive Changes to Public School Accountability Make It Through the Session

As you know, since I was elected, I have been an advocate for overhauling the state's K-12 accountability system. Under current law, all public schools and school districts are graded primarily on how well students perform on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT.

The calls for reform were heard in Tallahassee this year. In a unanimous vote, the Florida Legislature passed SB 1908, which expands the way high schools are graded under the state's education accountability system. SB 1908 establishes end-of-course exams in high school to complement the FCAT. The bill also reduces the emphasis of FCAT results in high school grades, changes the FCAT writing exam and pushes FCAT exam dates later in school year.

It expands the assessment for high schools by basing half of a school's grade on FCAT scores and half on other important measures such as a school's graduation rate and advanced placement course offerings.

Our children must prepare to compete in the global job market. This is why it is critical for students to leave with a well-balanced, cultured education that exposes them to world history, foreign affairs, competitive science standards and new technologies.

I was proud to support SB 1908 because it will introduce new priorities in our public schools. We must build on this year's passage of SB 1908 so our children are better prepared to compete in the global job market. •



Representative Shelley Vana speaking on the state's education accountability system.

Legislature Says YES to Consumer Protections. NO to Rate Reductions.

This year, SB 2860 passed the legislature unanimously because it was a good consumer protection bill. This bill repeals for a year the practice of insurance companies raising rates prior to obtaining approval by the Office of Insurance Regulation. Also the bill requires insurance companies to notify OIR 90 days before non-renewal of more than 10,000 policies in one year. More important is the provision that insurance companies cannot drop a customer without a 6 month notification. Finally, SB 2860 extends the Citizens rate freeze until January 1, 2010.

While this rate freeze was a start toward lowering your insurance premiums, it is not enough. There are good consumer protections in this measure, but without rate relief, many Floridians will continue to face financial challenges. •

Autism Spectrum Disorder Coverage Takes First Steps

During the 2008 Legislative Session, the Florida Legislature made increasing access to coverage for children with autism a priority.

The legislation will require large-group insurers to offer \$36,000 worth of annual medical coverage for autism to children 5 and under, with a lifetime cap of \$200,000 worth of benefits. This only covers children with autism, and does not include mandatory coverage for children with other developmental disabilities. Although this legislation is a more limited approach than the original House proposal, it is a crucial first step in providing help to families in Florida dealing with this health crisis. •

Uninsured Floridians Could See Access to Affordable Health Insurance

There are an estimated 3.8 million people without insurance in the state. The high cost of insurance is the main reason for this lack of coverage.

Senate Bill 2534 is the legislature's latest attempt to address health insurance affordability. The *Cover Florida* health insurance plan, which is part of comprehensive reforms that passed this year, is a step in the right direction. I do not expect it to solve the acute health care crisis facing our state, but it may begin to address it. *Cover Florida* contains needed oversight, which will likely produce insurance products that help many of our residents.

The *Cover Florida* plan will provide non-catastrophic coverage, offering preventive health services. Catastrophic coverage may also be provided. All plans offer prescription drug benefit coverage, use a prescription drug manager, or offer a discount drug card.

I was pleased to see that stronger consumer protections were a part of the final package. It is important that consumers get educated regarding the new insurance products that will be offered. With health insurance being such a complex issue, we will have to wait to see how the market responds to the reforms passed this year. We must remain vigilant and watchful to ensure covering Florida's uninsured remains a priority. •



Representative Shelley Vana addressing the Florida House of Representatives.

Investing In Clean Energy

With energy bills rising and gas hovering above \$4 per gallon, our nation has begun to look towards alternative energy sources to decrease our dependence on foreign oil. The Florida Legislature took both of these concerns seriously. We worked hard this session to encourage energy efficiency and to spur the development and production of alternative and renewable energies in Florida.

HB 7135 creates a 9-member Florida Energy and Climate Commission to guide the state's alternative energy policies and programs. The bill also authorizes the Department for Environmental Protection to adopt rules for a Cap-and-Trade Regulatory Program to address green house gas emissions from electric utilities, subject to legislative ratification and not prior to the 2010 Legislative Session. Also in the legislation that passed is a requirement that the Public Service Commission

adopt goals to increase and promote cost-effective demand-side and supply-side efficiency and conservation programs and renewable energy systems.

HB 7135 adopts Climate Friendly Public Business requirements for the use of "green" products, lodging, vehicles, and fuel. It creates energy standards for the construction of new state, county, municipal, school district, state university, community college, state court, and water management district buildings. Finally, the bill creates a Renewable Fuel Standard requiring that beginning on December 31, 2010, all gasoline sold in Florida contain, at a minimum, 10 percent ethanol, by volume.

The energy plan that passed this spring takes a significant step forward in moving our state to the national forefront of production and use of alternative energy. •